

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS—TRANSFER
OF EMPLOYEES FROM BELLEVILLE
TO MONTREAL

Mr. Lee Grills (Hastings): Mr. Speaker, my reason for stating this grievance tonight is some alarming decisions being made by senior officials of Canadian National Railways. The particular grievance to which I refer is the proposed transfer of many positions from the comptroller's office of the Rideau area now located in Belleville, to the regional office in Montreal, Quebec. We fear in our area that this is only the beginning of a program to centralize and move many more positions to Montreal. Belleville has been for many years a very important part of the CNR operation due to the fact that at one time more than 3,000 employees came from that area. It has been said that Belleville was built around the CNR.

This suggested move is alarming to these employees who have deep roots in the area, because at least 90 per cent of them own their homes there. They are a vital part of the local community and their children attend local schools. Many of these employees have been associated with the railway for a considerable time, and some of them have been associated with the CNR for as long as 28 years. In this particular department the average term of service is 16 years.

Furthermore, they are being asked to move to an area where many of their associates will be French-speaking. May I say, with all due respect to our French-Canadian neighbours, these employees do not speak French, nor will they be able to speak it in their lifetime. They are fearful of what this move will mean to them in the near future, especially if they are asked to speak both languages. They are also fearful of their children's lack of opportunity to be taught in English owing to certain conditions which exist in the area to which they are being asked to move. Furthermore, they would be moving to an area which is much more expensive than Belleville, and in addition they will lose their seniority. In plain words, their job security is at stake. While we all realize that changes must take place and certain economies must be made, it is well known that this operation could be carried out in the present location without any substantial, additional cost.

As a businessman I always recognize the value of public relations to human beings. At this time I question whether the officials who are making the decision are considering the

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basic principles of human rights with regard to their fellowmen. Many of these long time employees will not move and set up a home in such a large centre. This will result in the loss of many trained, experienced key workers, which will add to CNR costs in training new workers. It will also result in the downgrading of services to the passengers and in the dissatisfaction of the public.

It is my opinion that many officials in the local Belleville office are against the proposed move, but they are being overruled by the officials in Montreal who are far removed and are apparently not too interested in the human problems of affected CNR employees in the area. The proposed move has caused considerable alarm to our city council and to many citizens outside railway employee circles. The attitude on the part of officials at the senior level is considered to be callous.

In all sincerity, as a representative of these people I implore the Minister of Transport to make personal and forceful representations to the senior CNR officials to reconsider this inhuman treatment of loyal railway employees of long standing.

• (10:20 p.m.)

Mr. Gérard Loiselle (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I must say that the hon. member for Hastings (Mr. Grills) has made a good plea for his case tonight. I can imagine his worries about this matter because in my riding I have thousands and thousands of CNR employees, and if some change were made that would mean they would have to leave Montreal and go to Belleville, in the riding of the hon. member, I am sure that I would be complaining.

The hon. member must know that this decision was made by Canadian National Railways, and everyone in this House knows of the autonomy of Crown corporations. There is no easy facility whereby a ministerial office can impose a recommendation on a Crown corporation. After the member put his question to the minister yesterday, December 17, the Minister of Transport (Mr. Jamieson) took the matter up with representatives of the CNR in Montreal and in Ottawa.

I give the hon. member my personal assurance that tomorrow I will bring the arguments he has advanced tonight to the attention of the minister so that he may forward them to the CNR. Everyone knows the desire of the Minister of Transport to do everything